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May 9, 2004

The Salt Lake Tribune

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Wind power is part of the energy solution

By Craig Hibberd

Mike Peterson's April 25 column in the Opinion section, "Energy solutions for Utah will not be found blowing in wind," correctly pointed out some of the issues surrounding wind power, but makes the rather odd claim that "the wind does not always blow and people are not prepared to go without electricity on a calm day."

No one is asking for complete reliance on wind power. Wind is just another power source for a utility power portfolio. Wind is a free fuel and you take advantage of the wind when you have it.

Another odd statement in the op-ed by Peterson, who heads the Utah Rural Electric Association: "Utah's rural electric cooperatives believe it is better to be open about these (wind) subsidies and give customers and utilities a choice about buying renewable energy." While the electric cooperatives are quick to question subsidies for wind power, they are silent about the cheap power they get from the federal government.

If the rural electric cooperatives are so impressed with Utah Power's Blue Sky program, why don't they offer a similar program? Other electric cooperatives around the country are very active in promoting wind power. Basin Electric Cooperative in North Dakota offers wind power, Great River Energy cooperative in Minnesota sells wind power, and even tiny Highline Electric Association in Holyoke, Colo., offers wind power to its customers.

If the Utah electric coops dismiss wind power because there will be no electricity on calm days, their customers should be worried -- not about wind power but about their utilities' ability to conduct business.

The rural cooperatives have made other questionable power decisions in the past. Here is what J.P. Morgan Securities Inc. Credit Research said about the Deseret Generation and Transmission Co-operative Bonanza power plant in Vernal: "DG has had a history of financial difficulties related to excess capacity associated with the construction of the Bonanza coal-fired station."

Bonanza, partly financed by the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corp., showed a loan loss of \$12.8 million in 1991. This loss certainly qualifies as



Craig Hibberd

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a subsidy.

Wind energy is also about keeping money in the local community. Farmers leasing property to wind companies make \$2,500 to \$4,000 per year for each megawatt of installed wind power. It's just common sense for rural utilities to try to help local farmers.

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The Utah Rural Electric Association should be more pro-active in developing energy solutions instead of attacking one particular energy source.

 Craig Hibberd is an energy consultant working with electric utilities in the western United States. He lives in Moab.

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